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The Catholic Bishops of the Diocese of Alton, Illinois

BY REV. A. ZURBONSEN, QUINCY, ILLINOIS

The following sketches are intended to portray in brief outlines the lives and activities of the mitred men who held spiritual jurisdiction over that part of Illinois which today constitutes the diocese of Alton, Illinois.

RT. REV. WM. QUARTER, D. D.

FIRST BISHOP OF CHICAGO—MARCH 10, 1844-APRIL 10, 1848

During the Fifth Provincial Council of Baltimore, which convened May 14, 1843, the bishops present proposed to the Holy See the formation of three new bishoprics, namely, Little Rock, Albany and Chicago. The pious and zealous pastor of St. Mary's, New York City, was appointed first Bishop of Chicago. He was consecrated by the great Bishop John Hughes in the old Cathedral on Mott Street, New York City, on the third Sunday of Lent, March 10, 1844.

With the coming of Bishop Quarter to Chicago the southeastern portion of the present Alton diocese became eliminated from the jurisdiction of the Bishop of Vincennes, whose valiant clergy were likewise withdrawn and henceforth became subject to the new Ordinary of Chicago. Likewise did all rights of Bishop Rossati of St. Louis cease over Illinois.

Bishop William Quarter was born in Killurine, Kings County, Ireland, January 21, 1806. When sixteen years old he came to America, April 10, 1822. The vessel in which he sailed landed at Quebec. He applied to the bishops of Quebec and Montreal to be received as an ecclesiastical student, but his youth was urged as an objection. He then went to Mt. St. Mary's, Emmitsburg, Maryland, where he was gladly welcomed by Father Dubois, president of that institution. His progress, owing to a well-made preparatory course was rapid. On September 19, 1829, he was raised to the dignity of the

priesthood by the Rt. Rev. Dr. Dubois, Bishop of New York, under a special dispensation, he not being twenty-three years old. He became at once pastor of St. Peter's and on June 9, 1833, pastor of the new St. Mary's parish, which position he held till elevated to the Episcopacy in 1844. The recall of the priests by the Bishop of Vincennes from in and around Chicago and other portions of the eastern half of the State beset the new bishop with unexpected difficulties. In consequence he set about founding a college, the nucleus of the future University of St. Mary of the Lake, beginning with six students and two professors. Throughout his short episcopal career he maintained the same unflagging, zealous spirit which had characterized him as pastor in New York. He set out on a tour of inspection of the diocese. A diocesan visitation in those days was an arduous undertaking fraught with many risks and hazards, at a time when the vehicle was an ox-team or horse wagon, or horse-back, sitting on the quaint saddlebags, journeying in the marsh or prairie or through the forest—for Illinois along her creeks and rivers had in the forties her heavy wooded sections. Add to all this his mental work preparing for and holding his synod, publishing his excellent pastorals to mission rectors and their flocks, and above all that ever abiding thought "The solicitude of all the Church," of which an account is to be handed to the Shepherd of Souls. No wonder, being anyhow of a frail and delicate constitution, when he was shouldered "with a load that would sink a navy," he sank under the weight, writes Father Shaw in the story of the La Salle Mission, and after four years strengthened by all that is refreshing and hopeful, passed to his Lord, Whom he had served so faithfully. *Consummatus brevi explevit multa!*

Bishop William Quarter, who died a rather sad and sudden death April 10, 1848, was buried in a vault under the main altar of old St. Mary's Cathedral, in Chicago. R. I. P.

RT. REV. JAMES OLIVER VAN DE VELDE, D. D.
SECOND BISHOP OF CHICAGO—FEBRUARY, 1849—NOVEMBER, 1853

The calamity which by the sudden death of the energetic young Bishop Quarter had cast a pall of gloom and sadness over the youthful diocese of Chicago on April 10, 1848, was somewhat mitigated when it became known that the Holy See

had found a worthy successor to Bishop Wm. Quarter in the person of Very Rev. Oliver Van de Velde, S. J., native of Belgium, born April 3, 1785. He was a former president of St. Louis University and vice president of the Order; a man of great moral force and learning, well equipped for the exalted, though onerous and responsible position. The brother of our deceased bishop who had been his vicar general and counsellor in many difficulties and perplexities, Very Rev. Walter J. Quarter, had acted in the meantime as administrator of the bereaved diocese, receiving the appointment to that position from the Most Rev. Dr. Eccleston of Baltimore.

The prominent position occupied by Father Van de Velde in his own order, the important services rendered by him to the cause of religion in the United States and the acquaintance which was thus formed between him and many prelates of the church who entertained a high appreciation of his talents, piety and zeal led to his being selected as the successor of Bishop Quarter in the diocese of Chicago. Archbishop Eccleston received from Rome the bulls appointing him to that See December 1, 1848. He was consecrated by the Archbishop of St. Louis, Most Rev. Peter Kenrick, assisted by Bishop Loras of Dubuque and Bishop Miles of Nashville, on Sunday, February 11, 1849, in the Church of St. Francis Xavier, attached to the St. Louis University. Bishop Spalding of Louisville preached the consecration sermon.

The advent of the new Bishop into his diocese was hailed with delight by the clergy and laity of Chicago. After spending a few months in arranging the concerns of the diocese in Chicago and vicinity, he began his first visitation July 25, 1849. These visitations were journeys of severe labor and unremitting zeal for the spiritual improvement of his flock. Besides administering Confirmation at all practicable times and places, the distances were so great and the means of traveling so inconvenient and uncertain, that he had to pass through the country as a missionary laboring for the salvation of souls and performing every kind of clerical and spiritual service. Twice he made such episcopal visitations throughout the vast extent of his diocese within whose con-

finest the entire state was embraced, hence also the territory of the present Alton diocese.

Bishop Van de Velde's health had not been very good for several years; he suffered severely from rheumatism which was greatly aggravated by the cold, damp and penetrating air of Chicago. His health was still further impaired by the anxieties of his office and by the hostility and opposition of a small number of his clergy and laity. A few disaffected persons can accomplish much evil, and Bishop Van de Velde found himself frequently without adequate sympathy or support in his charitable efforts. (R. H. Clark in "Lives of Deceased Bishops.")

In consequence of his suffering health and the unfavorable influence of the northwestern climate he forwarded a petition to Rome to be released from the burden of office. It was during the second visitation of his diocese that he finally received from Rome the brief transferring him to the vacant See of Natchez, Mississippi, agreeably to his own request. The transfer dates from July 29, 1853. Bishop Van de Velde departed for the South November 3, 1853 and arrived at Natchez November 23, where he was most joyfully received by all the clergy and people who had so often heard of his great labors, noble sacrifices and heroic services to religion.

He died November 13, 1855, on the Feast of St. Stanislaus in whose honor he had just finished a novena, aged 60 years and 7 months. His remains were deposited in a vault under the sanctuary of St. Mary's Cathedral in Natchez.

RT. REV. ANTHONY O'REGAN, D. D.

THIRD BISHOP OF CHICAGO—1854-1857

Bishop O'Regan was born in the Town of Lavalloe, County Mayo, Ireland, in the year 1809. After completing his preparatory studies he spent eight years in Maynooth going through a thorough course of philosophy, theology, church history and sacred eloquence. Having completed his ecclesiastical studies he received Holy Orders and said his first Mass in the chapel of the Maynooth College. His superiors were anxious to retain the talented young priest for college work. With great success he taught for ten years at St. Jarlath's in Tuam, after which he rose to the presidency of the

institution; this position he occupied for five years with the greatest distinction.

In 1849 Archbishop Kenrick established his seminary at St. Louis and installed Father O'Regan, whom he had induced to come to America, as president. Under his regime the Seminary soon began to flourish and to send forth worthy laborers in the vineyard of the Lord.

Since the bishopric of Chicago had become vacant by the resignation of Bishop Van de Velde, the unanimous choice fell upon Father O'Regan as the man eminently qualified to fill the Episcopal office of that rapidly growing diocese. His name for the position was forwarded to Rome. The Holy See, in consequence of the strong recommendation and unanimous endorsement of Father O'Regan nominated him for the Chicago diocese and the bulls of appointment were immediately transmitted to the Archbishop of St. Louis. However, the Bishop-elect strenuously opposed the nomination and sent back the briefs to Rome. But the Holy See had spoken and did not withdraw its appointment. The bulls were returned to the Bishop-elect, who said: "I accept them only in the spirit of obedience."

On July 25, 1854, the feast of St. James the Apostle, the ceremony of consecration took place in the Cathedral of St. Louis; the Most Rev. Archbishop Kenrick was consecrator. The assistant Bishops were Rt. Rev. Oliver Van de Velde of Natchez, Rt. Rev. John Martin Henni of Milwaukee, Rt. Rev. Mathias Loras of Dubuque and Rt. Rev. Bishop Miles of Nashville. The eloquent sermon was preached by Rev. James Duggan of St. Louis (who a few years afterwards succeeded him as Bishop of Chicago).

On the 3rd day of September, 1854, the ceremony of installation took place in St. Mary's Cathedral amid the universal rejoicing of the clergy and laity of Chicago. It is easily understood that a vast field was opened to Bishop O'Regan on his arrival in his See city, and mighty interests at stake claimed his immediate attention, and he lost no time in looking after the pressing needs of the diocese.

When making a visitation of the diocese, he encountered as many hardships as his predecessors, but physically a strong man, he never knew sickness nor fatigue, hence he would fre-

quently walk from one mission to another when the distance was not too great.

But Bishop O'Regan was by no means a happy man under the weighty burden of the mitre. He had accepted the dignity of the Episcopacy under protest, in obedience, and he could never make the onerous duties congenial to his tastes. After a "trial," as he called it, he determined to go to Rome and place his resignation into the hands of the Supreme Pontiff. Bishop O'Regan's resignation was reluctantly accepted and he was appointed Bishop of Dora *in partibus infidelium*.

He passed the remainder of his life in quiet retreat at Michael's Grove, Brompton.

The third Bishop of Chicago died November 13, 1866, aged 57 years. His remains were conveyed to his native parish of Cloufad, Archdiocese of Tuam, where they found their last resting place. R. I. P.

RT. REV. JOSEPH MELCHER, D. D.

BISHOP-ELECT OF THE DIOCESE OF QUINCY

While the first Plenary Council of Baltimore was in session (1852) it was unanimously decided by the prelates assembled that the great diocese of Chicago, which comprised within its jurisdiction the whole State of Illinois, be partitioned and a second diocese in the southern part of the State be created. A petition to this effect was at once forwarded to Rome. Pope Pius IX acquiesced in the wishes thus expressed, and under date of July 29, 1853, formally and officially approved of the establishment of the new diocese of Quincy. The document which announced this important decision was signed by Cardinal Lambruschini. The territory set apart for the Diocese of Quincy comprised the counties of Adams, Brown, Cass, Menard, Sangamon, Macon, Moultrie, Coles and Edgar, on a line from the Mississippi to the Wabash River. It was to be a suffragan bishopric to the archbishopric of St. Louis. The new diocese had at the time of its erection (rather at the end of 1853) 51 churches, 34 missions, 23 priests and 42,000 members. Bishop Van de Velde had always manifested a great interest for Quincy, yea even previous to the receipt of above mentioned papal bull he had already selected a convenient spot for a future cathedral and episcopal resi-

dence there, in June, 1852. Had his ailments and adverse local conditions not influenced him to abdicate and move south to Natchez, Quincy would have had its bishop there and then.

Rome's selection for first bishop of the new diocese fell upon the Very Rev. Joseph Melcher, priest and Vicar General of the Archdiocese of St. Louis. However, Father Melcher declined the honor and refused to accept. Foreseeing the difficult task which awaited him as administrator of Chicago, which duty was assigned him since the resignation of Bishop Van de Velde had been acceded to by Rome, he became timorous. The Quincy diocese—*sede vacante*—was then placed under the administratorship of Archbishop Kenrick of St. Louis and that of Chicago under the bishop of Milwaukee till the appointment of Bishop Anthony O'Regan to the vacancy of Chicago, who was consecrated in St. Mary's Cathedral of that city on September 3, 1854.

And what became ultimately of the See of Quincy? Remonstrances to its continuance were sent to Rome based on allegations that Quincy as a seat of a bishop was too far removed from the center of the diocese, being located almost in its extreme northwestern corner. At the Provincial Council held in St. Louis, October, 1855, the opponents to Quincy were in the majority, resolutions were adopted by which the transfer of the See from Quincy to Alton was urgently suggested to the Roman propaganda. Rome acted on this suggestion, the Diocese of Alton was established January 9, 1857, with the appointment of Rev. Damian Juncker of Dayton, Ohio, as its first bishop. The diocese of Quincy became absorbed by that of Alton.

Bishop-Elect Melcher continued his duties as priest and Vicar General in St. Louis until his elevation to the bishopric of Green Bay, Wisconsin, July, 1868. He died in 1873.

A native of Vienna, he was born in the Austrian capital March 19, 1806, ordained a priest March 27, 1830, and arrived in America in 1843, when he at once set out for St. Louis, Missouri. R. I. P.

RT. REV. HENRY DAMIAN JUNCKER, D. D.

FIRST BISHOP OF ALTON—1857-1868

Rt. Rev. Henry Damian Juncker, the prelate chosen to preside as first bishop over the destinies of the infant diocese

of Alton, was a man distinguished for the sanctity of his life and the devotedness to his missionary labors. He was a native of Fenetrance, Lorraine, born August 22, 1809. He came to this country when young, attached himself to the Diocese of Cincinnati, made his ecclesiastical studies in that city and was raised to the priesthood by Bishop Purcell on Passion Sunday, March 16, 1834, at Cincinnati, being the first priest ordained by that prelate.

He was appointed to Holy Trinity, the first German church in Cincinnati, and in 1836 became rector of St. Mary's, Canton, attending it with its numerous missions for ten years, when he was transferred to Urbana, also a position of no little labor. In 1845 he was made pastor of the Church of Emmanuel at Dayton. Father Juncker had spent twenty-three years in onerous missionary labor until 1857, when he became bishop of Alton. The consecration ceremonies were performed by Bishop Purcell on Sunday, April 26, 1857, in St. Peter's Cathedral, Cincinnati. The assistant prelates were Bishop Henni of Milwaukee and Bishop Young of Erie. There were also present Bishops Niles, Lefevre, Spalding, De St. Palais and Carroll.

The work to be accomplished by Bishop Juncker in a new and rapidly growing country, then but imperfectly supplied with priests, churches and schools, was arduous and difficult. He spared no effort to build up the church around him, and to supply his flock with the blessings of religion and education. His visitations of his diocese were long and severe journeys, and laborious missions among the people, in which the bishop performed every office of the priesthood.

At his arrival the Diocese of Alton was supplied with 58 churches, 30 stations, 28 priests and a population of about 50,000. The bishop soon became convinced that his diocese was suffering for want of priests. Unable to satisfy himself in this country he turned his eyes towards older lands in the hope of recruiting available subjects. Accordingly he left late in the fall of 1857 for France, Italy, Germany and Ireland. In all these countries his efforts were crowned with success. Accompanied by many of his recruits he sailed for Havre in June, 1858, eager to repair to his diocese. On his return home he lost no time to prepare his students for ordination. To the

Franciscans he gave charge of the important mission at Teutopolis in Effingham County.

The statistics of the Diocese of Alton in 1868, the year of the bishop's death, contain the proudest eulogy on Bishop Juncker and his work. The number of priests was increased to 100, beside 25 clerical students, the churches to 123, the parochial schools to 56. He bequeathed to his diocese also two colleges for boys, six academies for girls, two hospitals and an orphan asylum. He also erected the present fine episcopal residence, intended at the same time to serve as his ecclesiastical seminary.

After a long and severe illness Bishop Juncker died at his residence in Alton on the Feast of the Guardian Angels, October, 2, 1868.

RT. REV. PETER JOSEPH BALTES, D. D.

SECOND BISHOP OF ALTON—1870-1886

Ensheim, in Rhenish Bavaria, claims honor of being the birthplace of the second bishop of Alton diocese, the Rt. Rev. Peter Joseph Baltès, D. D. There he first saw the light of day on April 7, 1824. When six years old he immigrated with his parents to America. The family settled in the State of New York. At the age of sixteen he took private lessons and thereupon continued his classical course at Holy Cross College, Worcester, Massachusetts. He studied philosophy and theology at the Seminary of St. Mary's of the Lake, Chicago, whilst he himself was instructor in German and acted as prefect of studies. On May 21, 1853, he was elevated to the priesthood at the Grand Seminary of Montreal. His first mission was Waterloo, in Monroe County, where he remained until 1855, when he was ordered to Belleville. Here his first care was to place the parochial school on a good, solid basis. For this purpose he called in the school sisters of Notre Dame. His next attention was directed towards building a new church. Everything went seemingly well in spite of many oppositions and difficulties when owing to some defects in construction the grand edifice, which was nearing completion, collapsed. Undaunted and undismayed by these reverses, Father Baltès resumed work again only more complete and secure. The dedication of St. Peter's—now the Belleville cathedral—

was a day of triumph for the indomitable rector. Archbishop Kenrick of St. Louis preached during the Pontifical Mass celebrated by Bishop Juncker, and Rev. P. J. Ryan, the late Archbishop of Philadelphia, delivered in the evening one of his best lectures, never to be forgotten by those who had the privilege of hearing it.

When, in 1866, Bishop Juncker went to Baltimore to attend the Second Plenary Council, his choice fell on the Belleville rector as his theologian. Upon the suggestion of Archbishop Purcell of Cincinnati, he was, on the way to Baltimore, made vicar general of the Alton Diocese. When Bishop Juncker died, Father Baltes was appointed administrator of the vacant See. During his administration he obtained from the Illinois State Legislature the passage of a law under which the Catholic congregations and institutions of the diocese could be incorporated, entitled: "An Act to provide for the holding of Roman Catholic Churches, Cemeteries, Colleges and other property." It was a wise and prudent move on his part, as was repeatedly demonstrated soon after the law's enactment.

On September 24, 1869, Very Rev. Administrator Baltes was appointed by Pope Pius IX to succeed Bishop Juncker. The consecration of the new Bishop took place in the church built by him, St. Peter's in Belleville, January 23, 1870. As nearly all the bishops were in Rome attending the Vatican Council, the difficulty was to secure bishops for the occasion. Rt. Rev. Bishop Luers of Fort Wayne, one of the few who had remained at home, was the consecrator, assisted by Bishop Toebbe of Covington—just consecrated himself—and by the Very Rev. P. J. Ryan, vicar general and administrator of St. Louis.

Father Baltes had been great as pastor, he became even greater as bishop. This he proved by submitting the whole diocese in all its varied activities to a thorough reorganization. He established regulations, laws and discipline and demanded indiscriminately obedience and respect for Episcopal authority. He waged an unrelenting war with some of the foremost and ablest Catholic newspapers of the land, which had again and again assailed his authority in matters of discipline. Ambitious in his work, he aimed at finding himself placed at the

head of the finest body of clergymen in the country and a time came when it was deemed an honor to belong to the Diocese of Alton.

After a life of great activity Bishop Baltes died February 15, 1886. His funeral took place February 19, and was attended by Archbishops Feehan of Chicago, Kenrick of St. Louis and Heiss of Milwaukee, and by Bishop Hogan of Kansas City, by 160 priests and vast crowds of the laity. The remains were deposited in the vault under the sanctuary of the cathedral beside those of his predecessor, Bishop Juncker. R. I. P.